WGSS 493M/693M: Conversations with the Ghost of Marx

Professor: K. Asher (kasher@umass.edu)  
Semester: Spring 2020  
Time: Th 1-3:30pm  
Place: W465 South College

Office: W467 South College  
Office Hours: Thurs 11:30am-12:30pm (Open hours). Weds: 11am-noon. (by appointment)  
Check Moodle for updates.  
Classlist: wgss-693m-01-spr20@courses.umass.edu (493 students will be added to this list)

Seminar focus and goals: In Europe and the People without History, Eric Wolf, the late anthropologist notes that, “… the social sciences constitute one long dialogue with the ghost of Marx.” Feminists and anti-colonialists are among the many advocates of social justice who have engaged with Karl Marx’s writing and fierce criticism of capitalism. This advanced seminar focuses on an exegesis of some of Marx’s œuvre and the historical and current scholarship that draws on, critiques, and pushes its boundaries. In addition to selections from Marx’s key works, we will read the writings of his important interlocutors such as Silvia Federici, Donna Haraway, Antonio Gramsci, Stuart Hall, CLR James, Rosa Luxemburg, Gayatri Spivak, Raymond Williams, and others. Our discussions will emphasize the need to understand the parameters and debates about uneven capitalist development and its transnational, raced and gendered dimensions.

Prerequisites: This is an advanced seminar (for undergraduates and graduates) and requires you to have a solid analytical knowledge and transnational understanding of feminisms (syllabi of WGSS courses are on our website), political economy, and social theory. In addition, students should also be familiar with some of Marx’s writings and the context within which he critiqued capitalist political economy. You can refresh your understanding of these terms by consulting material covered in the background readings listed below and sent over the break. These pre-requisites are key to the critical reading/exegesis approach of the course, and without them students will be unable to keep up with the term of the course.

In addition, it will help to have familiarity with some of Marx’s writings and thought. Some of you may have already taken classes, others should consult the readings sent over the break. That is, this course is not designed to give an introduction to Marx’s writing or Marxist thought. But those of you who are willing to read openly and have the prerequisites may be fine with reading Marx’s work for the first time.

Course Approach:

We will NOT be learning how to become revolutionaries, nor on how to “apply” Marx. We will learn to READ critically and analytically, just as Marx did in his time and feminists do in ours. Such a reading is a key part of critical praxis. Anyone can learn these skills if they are willing and open to doing so. But it requires time and patience. We will begin that work here (and have fun!) If you are in a hurry, and think that you will be impatient with yourself and with the material, this is NOT the course for you.

During the first five weeks of the semester, we will read selections from Marx’s œuvre and those of his interlocutors. We will revisit them in the second half of the semester. Each student must lead two seminar discussions (one before the midterm and the
second after). Your two reading reviews must be based on one or more selected readings from that session. Post your reading reviews on Moodle 24 hours before the start of the seminar, and hand in a hard copy to me at the start of class. Given that there are fewer weeks than students, multiple students will be responsible for each session. You may coordinate with each other to lead seminar discussions or let things flow organically. Of course each of you is responsible for writing your own reading review. Details about writing reviews are below.

After the midterm, we will collectively choose readings for the second half of the semester. This is part of the radical and feminist pedagogy of the course that requires us to be responsible to our learning and those of others around us. While there is flexibility in what we read and how we approach the seminar, remember the central focus of our endeavors is an exegesis of Marx’s writing and how historical and current scholarship draws on, critiques, and pushes its boundaries.

Selected required Readings:

  [https://muse.jhu.edu/book/34838](https://muse.jhu.edu/book/34838)
- [https://www.marxists.org/](https://www.marxists.org/) [Note: you may need to cut and paste the link. It is buggy]

Selected Background readings (On Reserve)


Assignments and Grades

- Attendance & Participation 25%
- Two Reading Reviews (details below) 20%
- Midterm (due before Spring break, details on Moodle) 25%
- Final Assignment (due Apr 30, details on Moodle by Apr 23) 30%

**Attendance and Absences:** The success of the class depends on the instructor and students being physically and intellectual present in class. Being a little late occasionally is understandable. However, if you are more than 10 minutes late, you will be marked absent.
If you have to miss a seminar session because of legitimate reasons (illness, injury, death of a loved one), excuse your absence in writing within a week of the missed session. Over two absences will automatically result in the lowering of your overall grade, as even excused absences will affect your participation grade (you get 2 points for each day you are present, and 1 point for late or excused sessions).

If you miss class unavoidably, it is still your responsibility to keep up with the readings, write reading responses, and catch up on what you missed. Set up a “study buddy” with whom you can exchange notes, review material, and check in about intellectual or logistical issues related to the class.

Study Buddy 1: __________________________________________________________

Study Buddy 2: __________________________________________________________

Reading and Preparation: Good participation and great conversations rest on good preparation. Learn to develop a practice of reading closely (https://writingcenter.fas.harvard.edu/pages/how-do-close-reading) to identify main theme(s) and examine the premise of an argument critically. I recommend that you write critical responses on the assigned readings and bring hard copies to each class.

Participation: Good participation means active and mindful engagement with the course material and class participants, including your peers. Active and mindful engagement goes beyond agreements and disagreements to foster collective learning through critical dialogues about the topics and ideas generated by the course material. Critical dialogues entail listening, thinking, talking, and asking questions of the material and of each other. The best classrooms conversations are ones that expand your knowledge and understanding, and bring the intense pleasure of intellectual inquiry. It is a skill that requires practice and like other academic skills it is useful far beyond the classroom. For other key campus resources see https://www.umass.edu/studentlife/single-stop

Notes: Learn to keep notes on what you read. Instructions on writing critical reading responses provide guidelines on how to take good notes. For example, identify central claims, highlight key quotes (note the full citation with page numbers), understanding how an author develops an argument, how the terms of one article relate to the broader course themes. Notes are a good place to flag what you don’t understand and on confusing points, which we can discuss and clarify in class. So bring your readings and notes to class!

These notes are for your own use (or to share with your peers/study buddies). You may NOT sell these notes or critical reading responses to outside vendors, nor make audio or video recordings of class lectures and discussions without my permission.

Using smart phones in class is decidedly un-smart as it invites me to fail you. When in class turn OFF your mobile devices. You may seek permission to use your computer in class to refer to readings and notes, and to take notes. However, please do not connect to the Internet.
Online communications and Email etiquette: Instructions, study questions, and updates about the course will be posted on Moodle and/or sent through the class lists (see above). So ensure that your university email (yourname@umass.edu) works, and check Moodle regularly. I welcome appropriate email queries and will respond to them within a reasonable amount of time (24-48 hours is normal). For a distinction between appropriate and inappropriate email, familiarize yourself with Emails as Professional Correspondences or Email Etiquette. In addition, review the syllabus and Moodle to check whether your question has already been answered. For example, office hours, due dates, assignment instructions, etc. are listed in the syllabus and on Moodle. All changes to readings, assignments, due dates, etc. are also listed on Moodle.

Office Hours (listed at the top of the syllabus and updated on Moodle) are for students. So do stop by with questions about class material, brainstorm research ideas, talk about topics that spark your intellectual curiosity, or discuss your performance in class. However, office hours are not the space to review course material you missed or entertain inquiry such as “I was absent, what did I miss?” Talk to your study buddies first and then follow up with me to discuss specific queries.

Research: Go beyond wikipedia and google! UMASS libraries (click the Menu button on the upper right) have excellent resources and amazing professional staff to help you meet your learning goals. So learn to use them and to do library research.

Writing is a crucial tool for learning and an invaluable skill for communicating what you learn. So learn to write well. Check out http://owl.english.purdue.edu, one of the most extensive lists of handouts on writing and research help. You can also get free writing help at the Writing Center, and from the WGSS writing tutor (check Moodle for office hours). Take a copy of the assignment instructions, the course writing checklist and grading criteria along with your draft response to your session. Engage your editing process by articulating what you want the tutor to focus on in addressing your work. Lastly, pay attention to the comments on your graded assignments, especially the reading reviews so that you can learn from them to do better on longer papers.

Written Work: There will be two short reading reviews, and two longer writing assignments (a midterm and a final) for this seminar. The midterm will involve your writing an essay in which you describe, review and critically evaluate readings discussed thus far in the seminar. The nature and form of the final assignment is something we will determine together after the midterm.

Reading Reviews are critical reflections (3-4 pages each excluding references) on one or more selected readings from the week that students lead discussions. Post your reading reviews on Moodle 24 hours before the start of the seminar, and hand in a hard copy to me at the start of class. Your readings should identify, annotate and then evaluate the arguments discussed in the week’s readings. Reading reviews differ from annotations (if you haven’t taken classes with me before or need to know how to write an annotation – see Moodle) in that an analysis and thoughtful critique follows a concise identification and
summary of arguments. Remember that neither blanket criticism nor untempered praise is a good critical response. Avoid over generalized or banal statements, and make sure you have a fair and clear understanding of the ideas you wish to flesh out or critique. Attach a list of references cited in your review, and make sure to give your review an appropriate title.

All Written assignments:
- May be discussed with your peers, tutors, or with me during my office hours
- Must be submitted by the stated deadlines. By handing in assignments late you forfeit your right to comments and loose half a letter grade for every day that your work is late. So learn to manage your time http://www.studygs.net/shared/mgmnt.htm
- May be revised and resubmitted accepted within two weeks of receiving comments back from the instructor. Submit hardcopies of your substantially revised written work along with the original submission(s). Note that resubmitting a paper does not guarantee a higher grade. In fact, cursorily rewritten work may receive a lower grade than the original.
- Should comply with the Checklist of Written Work guidelines (see below).
- Will be graded according to the criteria listed below.

CRITERIA FOR GRADING WRITTEN WORK

A = a well organized, lucidly written paper free of mechanical errors (or oral argument) that indicates your thorough understanding of the material and your interesting insights or critical responses to it. In a phrase, an A paper is a “perfect 10” paper.

B = a paper (or presentation) that offers evidence of your understanding of the material, but in which your points are obscured due to mechanical errors, lack of organization, inadequate evidence and/or insufficiently developed arguments.

C = a paper in which the student’s understanding and response to the material is unclear or largely obscured due to any one or more factors listed under B.

D, F = indicate that students are submitting unacceptable work.

Slash grades (B/B+): Sometimes I give slash grades This means that the assignment is tending towards the higher grade but is not there yet. If you do better in the next assignment of a similar nature, the prior one will automatically be graded higher.

GRADE CHART

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**Academic Honesty Statement:** Since the integrity of the academic enterprise of any institution of higher education requires honesty in scholarship and research, academic honesty is required of all students at UMass. Academic dishonesty is prohibited in all programs of the University. Academic dishonesty includes but is not limited to: cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, and facilitating dishonesty. Appropriate sanctions may be imposed on any student who has committed an act of academic dishonesty. Instructors should take reasonable steps to address academic misconduct. Any person who has reason to believe that a student has committed academic dishonesty should bring such information to the attention of the appropriate course instructor as soon as possible. Instances of academic dishonesty not related to a specific course should be brought to the attention of the appropriate department Head or Chair. Since students are expected to be familiar with this policy and the commonly accepted standards of academic integrity, ignorance of such standards is not normally sufficient evidence of lack of intent (http://www.umass.edu/dean_students/codeofconduct/acadhonesty/).

**Accommodation Statement:** Disability Services (DS) on campus keeps documentation on file of physical, psychological, or learning disability and provides services to students with disabilities: http://www.umass.edu/disability/. They also act as a liaison between students and professors. If you need accommodations related to disabilities, please contact DS and me within the first two weeks of the term (before the add/drop period ends) so that we can work together to meet your learning needs. *A letter from Disability Services is not sufficient excuse for late or missed work or absences.* If, after consulting the syllabus, you anticipate missing classes or think you will need alternative formats and timelines for assignments, please communicate with me in person during office hours so that we can make mutually agreeable arrangements.

**Pronoun Statement:** I will gladly address you by the name you prefer and use the gender pronouns that correspond to your gender identity. Please advise the class and me on your name and pronoun preference, and the proper pronunciation of your name.
Checklist for Written Work for Prof Asher, AKA her 20 COMMANDMENTS!

1. My paper has a title. It tells my reader what my paper is about.
2. I have a central argument or a main point. I state it clearly.
3. I define the key terms on which my argument is based.
4. I have developed my argument systematically and my ideas are well organized. That is, my points follow from each other and speak to my central argument.
5. After stating my claims, I substantiate them with supporting evidence. This includes drawing on relevant course readings, and citing them in a correct and consistent format. Prof Asher prefers the author-date style: http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html
6. My entire paper is clear and focused with clear transitions between paragraphs and sections.
7. The passive voice has not been used by me. Instead, I use the active voice.
8. My sources are formatted correctly and consistently, as is my Reference List.
9. In my introductory and concluding remarks, I neither over generalize nor make banal claims. Rather, I begin and conclude with insightful remarks about my topic.
10. I have proof read my paper to ensure that it is free from repeated errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar, and I have used short sentences and made sure that my sentences do not run on like this one does.

Logistical and Mechanical details checklist

1. My name, course name and number, type and number of the assignment, and the date of the paper appear single-spaced in the upper left hand corner of the first page.
2. I have used a legible font, double-spaced my writing, and used 1.25-inch margins.
3. I have numbered all the pages of my assignment.
4. I have STAPLED all the pages of my assignment. Paper clips are not staples.
5. I am NOT including a cover page or a report cover with my assignments.
6. I have submitted my paper on time and in the format indicated on the assignment. Rubric for naming electronic documents: Your Last Name_Assignment_Course#_Term, e.g. Asher_Final_493M_Fall2018.
7. I know the penalties for submitting assignments late, and acknowledge that Prof Asher does not accept papers via email.
8. I have avoided plagiarism: https://plagiarism.duke.edu/procedures/table.php.
9. I have (or will) conferenced my assignment with the WGSS writing tutor or at the Writing Center (http://www.umass.edu/writingcenter/).
10. I have or will check out Section V of Strunk and White’s The Elements of Style (on Moodle). (PS: The White here is E B White, author of Charlotte’s Web)
Course Schedule: This is a working course schedule and is subject to change. For example, readings may be added or substituted at the professor's discretion. The readings listed under each week are for that week. That is, please read the listed material before coming to class.

Week 1, Th, Jan 23: Introduction to the seminar through discussion of the following
- The context and relevance of Marx for feminist and other political projects
- Structure of the seminar
- Marx, K and F. Engels. The Communist Manifesto (excerpt from the Norton Edition of the ME Reader) or via Marxists.org
- Spivak, Gayatri C. 2016. *Global Marx?* Public lecture at ICSI. Available at http://www.criticalsocialinquiry.org/publiclectures/2016/8/8/gayatri-spivak-global-marx-at-the-institute-for-critical-social-inquiry-icsi (talk begins at around 10 mins and ends at 1:13 followed by 30 mins of Q and A. Listen slowly and carefully, especially to the 30 mins between the start of the talk and roughly the 40 min mark)

Supplemental
- Jacqueline Rose’s review of Rosa Luxemburg’s letters https://www.lrb.co.uk/v33/n12/jacqueline-rose/what-more-could-we-want-of-ourselves

Week 2, Jan 30: Locating/Contextualizing Marx and his Oeuvre
- Introduction to participants and why each of us wants to read Marx, which works?
- Preface and Intro to Marx-Engels Reader
- Ernest Mandel’s introduction to *Capital vol I*
- Marx, K. Wage, Labour, Capital. In *The Marx-Engels Reader*

Week 3, Feb 6: Imperialism and Capitalism
- Marx, *Imperialism in India*, in The ME Reader

Supplemental (or for second half of semester)
- Selections from Kevin Anderson’s bibliography
Week 4, Feb 13: Marxist Feminisms and Feminist Marxisms [split over two weeks?]
- Brown, Heather. [link to article]
- Engels *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884), pp. 734-759
- Hartmann, Heidi. 1979. The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a more progressive union. *Capital and Class* vol 3: 1-33
- MacKinnon, C. 1982. Feminism, Marxism, Method, And The State: An Agenda For Theory (Extract from Maggie Humm’s *Modern Feminisms*)

Supplemental (or for second half of semester)
- Selections from Dorothy Smith, Diane Elson, Kathi Weeks, Silvia Federici, Maria Mies, Cindi Katz,

Week 5, Feb 20: Colonialism and “Postcolonial” Marxism
- Marx, The Secret of Primitive Accumulation (1847) pp. 432-438
- Wolf, Eric. *Europe and the People without history*. Introduction
- Revisit sections of Anderson’s *Marx on the Margins*
- Looking forward to what we want to do in the second half of the semester. On Moodle, I have posted what students have selected in past seminars. Please note they are FYI only. You should focus on what you want to do and we can discuss and finalize themes and readings for this group.

Week 6: Feb 27
- Wolf, Eric. *Europe and the People without history. Chapter 3 (Modes of Production)*
- Marx, Karl. Chapters 2 and 3 from *Capital, vol I*
Topics and readings for Weeks 7-13 to be decided collectively. For example, we could continue reading Capital, Vol I (that’s why I ordered it), or we could do read on various topics. See Moodle for some reference lists and potential readings. Whatever we decide to read, everyone should submit a prospectus for their final assignment by noon on Friday before Spring break – this will be part of your midterm.


Week 7: Mar 5
- Marx, Karl. selections from Capital, vol I OR review before midterm

Week 8, Mar 11 Suggested topic/theme: Social reproduction
- Federici
- Katz
- Luxemburg

SPRING BREAK- No Class

Week 9, Mar 26: Suggested topic/theme: Gramsci and Marx
- Krehan
- Selections from Spivak
- Selections from Gramsci

Week 10, Apr 2: Suggested topic/theme: Colonialism and Race Redux

Week 11, Apr 9 Professor Asher at conference – guest class or work day

Week 12, Apr 16: Present topics and draft works for final assignment

Week 13, Apr 23: LAST CLASS: A collective closure

Final assignment will be due on Apr 30.
STUDENT SELECTED THEMES and READINGS from Fall 2018

Week 8: Gendered and Raced Production and Reproduction II: The Accumulation of Capitalism and Imperialism
- Wolf, Eric. Europe and the People Without History. Chapter 10 (Moodle)
- Marx, K. Vol 3 in ME Reader

Supplemental
- Brewer’s Marxist Theories of Imperialism.
- Luxemburg, Rosa. 1912 The Accumulation of Capital (Section 3: Chpts 28 and 29), and 1915 The Accumulation of Capital: An Anti-Critique (Chapter 1: Questions and Stake, and Chpt 6: Imperialism) (on Marxist.org – please search yourselves as the links are buggy)

Week 9: Producing Subjects and Ideology: Parsing Marx’s Methods
- Thesis on Feuerbach, p. 143-145; Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy; The Method of Political Economy; Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844 (All from the ME Reader)
- Althusser - Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (on www.marxists.org)

Week 10: Producing [Revolutionary/Resisting] Subjects
- Spivak, Can the Subaltern Speak?
- “Translation as Culture” (Chapter 11, and other selections from An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization)
- Marx, 18th Brumaire (also have something on Brumaire and representation in Diana’s downloads)
Suggested
- Grundrisse and the German Ideology, Part I, p. 146-200 (ME Reader)
- Foucault, Michel

Week 11: Present abstract and outline of final papers/literature review

Week 12: Producing [Gendered, Raced, (Dis)Abled] Subjects
- Marx, Karl. Capital Vol I, Chapter 10
- Spivak, Gayatri. 2012. The Double Bind Starts to Kick (Chpt 4), and Culture: Situation Feminism (Chapter 5). In An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization.

Supplemental/Skim
- Refresh your understanding of Feminist Standpoint Theories, socialist feminisms

Week 13: A collective closure
- Marx, The Communist Manifesto
- Kevin Anderson, Marx at the Margins
- Spivak, Supplementing Marxism (chpt 8), and Scattered Speculations on the Subaltern and Popular (chpt 20). In An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization.

Supplemental
- Dunayevskaya, Rosa Luxemburg, Women’s Liberation and Marx’s Philosophy of Revolution. (on Marxist.org – please search yourselves as the links are buggy)